

May 24, 1966

John E.
Mr. Robert Merriam
Legislative Assistant to Senator Kuchel
Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Merriam:

"Costing Human Life" is a first pass as a note on one of the issues we discussed. I have been talking with the Washington Post and Newsweek about the possibility of doing a regular column and this might be thought of as a pilot piece. Most likely nothing will come of this, but it may explain the format.

A couple of years ago I thought we would have the leisure for a lengthy academic discussion of "euphenics" before bringing it to public and legislative notice. Now I find, as expected, that my own bizarre 'prophesies' are still too conservative, and it looks to me now as if Medicare plus the plastic heart are about to blow the lid off. The moral issues are still better left to private conscience, but there is plenty that needs doing now in public policy.

So I am now prepared to recommend some more concrete action. It seems to me that investigation and planning is more a legislative than executive responsibility. I propose the start of extensive hearings on "Future Technology and Human Life - model of the next five decades," in which medical technology should play a preeminent role. As a prelude to the wider hearings, Congress could establish an advisory legislative commission.

I realize this brings up the question how Congress can receive the kind of academic advice now available to the Executive. I do not think the National Academy of Science is the answer: advisers must sometimes be confidants, and therefore chosen by the congressmen and responsible to them. So this is a tricky business. I would not like to see a Republican vs a Democratic roster of scientists, but this is just Senator Kuchel's

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special strength (I am pretty consistently Democratic, but I don't see anybody in sight whom I support ahead of Kuchel) - that he could get any one in academic life he wanted into his confidence and solidly behind him - even people who don't agree with every position he takes. But these organizational details can be worked out on the strength of a decision to mount a major effort in public and legislative education.

It is of utmost importance to keep to the broadest system outlook. The recent Presidential Commission on automation degenerated into a labor-management brawl.

Is this too vast for a start? Even if we concentrated on medical technology, we would not be much narrower: this is going to be the major industry and we are not going to be able to disentangle medical progress from the consumer demand for sophisticated hardware, from the age composition and its implications for labor force, military manpower, urban planning, educational requirements and all the rest!

There is a certain amount of this kind of thinking now, of course. But it doesn't have enough communication between disciplines, and it doesn't focus anywhere. Congress could impel that.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL:bm